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Peace Through War?

United States and Israeli Strategies

Heribert Adam

Can the lessons learned from South Africa's struggle with apartheid be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Is a two-state solution in the Middle East a realistic way out of the long-standing dilemma? Or is a common state (what Israelis usually refer to as a "bi-national" state, which might be defined by a high security barrier, a feasible solution? The author investigates the implications of Iraq and 9/11 on progress toward a solution.




Will a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be achieved soon? Can the South African negotiated revolution be a model for the Middle East? Is the imperial Bush administration, fresh from a victory in Iraq, appeasing Arab resentment by applying pressure to their client state Israel? Is a reformed Palestinian administration capable of reining in fundamentalist extremists and suicide bombers? Will the neighboring Muslim states, particularly Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, under pressure from the United States, normalize relations with Israel and recognize the moral legitimacy of the Jewish state? Will Israel, in a trade-off, withdraw to its pre-1967 borders, evacuate its 400,000 settlers from conquered Palestinian land, and divide Jerusalem as a joint capital of a Jewish and Palestinian state?

Methodological and Moral Approaches

Anyone attempting to answer these questions "yes" rather than "no" must face a disappointing reality. In analyzing emotionally charged conflicts involving heated debates about ethnic divisions and moral claims, whether in Israel or South Africa, one ought to guard against four traps: moralizing, theologizing, medicalizing, and personalizing.

Moralizing focuses on what ought to happen rather than what is likely to occur. We all have our moral preferences, but we must avoid being blinded by them because wishful thinking all too often overrides the need for a hard-nosed reality check. Realistic accounting turns out to be depressing and uncomfortable, but it is preferable to living with illusions about the inevitable triumph of good over evil. "Restoring Hope" is an inspiring theme for an academic conference on a seemingly intractable conflict, but the hope must be realistic. Moral sermons about the evils of the adversary only preach to the converted.

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Theologizing mystifies sociopolitical events as resulting from divine intervention or inexplicable causes. To dub the South African negotiated revolution a “miracle” explains nothing. Praying for better times may comfort the soul, but to rest hopes on its outcome is to be paralyzed. At the same time, religious beliefs have to be taken very seriously, because people act on the basis of their firmly held faith.

Medicalizing a deplorable social condition — likening it to a disease, a cancer that needs to be eradicated, or a pathological condition that must be cured — resonates as an enticing metaphor. What does Tony Blair’s phrase, “terrorism as a spreading virus,” explain? It may be true that the president of the new virtuous empire is a “moron,” as a senior Canadian official said of George Bush, but such labels do not help to evaluate policy. Medical analogies assume involuntary destiny, which obscures the conscious forces and interests behind specific policies.

Personalizing policy issues and demonizing leaders has a similarly ineffectual result. Merely denouncing Sharon as “the butcher of Shatila,” neglects the reasons underlying his growing appeal to a frightened Israeli electorate. Leaders mainly represent and articulate underlying interests and sentiments. Yet while leaders are mouthpieces of their constituencies, they also mobilize, instigate, and persuade. It is for this reason that one may speculate whether Sharon may in time mutate into an Israeli de Gaulle or a F. W. de Klerk. The obsession with an unreliable Arafat also testifies to a personalized politics that results from the desire to build on predictability.

Zionism, as Jewish nationalism has been labeled, differed from similar European nationalism in two respects: it was a historical latecomer and it was successfully realized in a territory where the majority of inhabitants were not Jews but Palestinians. The foundation of Israel in 1948 as a refuge for victims of century-long European anti-Semitism is inextricably linked to the Holocaust. Since then, the horrendous Nazi crimes may have been exploited for other ends; current anti-Semitism may have been exaggerated, as such Jewish authors as Novick and Finkelstein have argued, but one only has to listen to the shocking utterances of the Malaysian Prime Minister to understand why even many non-Israeli Jews shudder when the sanctuary of Israel is criticized. As the New York historian Tony Judt has parodied the dominant liberal reaction: “To find fault with the Jewish state is to think ill of Jews, even to imagine an alternative configuration in the Middle East is to indulge the moral equivalent of genocide.”¹ Yet a critique of Israeli policies ought not to be confused with anti-Semitism. The accusation of anti-Semitism silences all evaluation of Israeli action. A blind endorsement of everything Sharon does — or more common, uneasy silence — by the Jewish diaspora goes against the very Jewish tradition of rational argumentation. Fortunately, that tradition of free debate continues in a lively civil society in Israel itself, although the government opposition has become rather moribund and marginalized. The Jewish diaspora is, willingly or unwillingly, identified with Israeli policy and the unresolved conflict backfires on Jews abroad. Rather than whitewashing Israel, it may be in the interest of everyone to assist the peace process in the Middle East and oppose Zionist extremism as much as one should Islamist extremism.

Implications of Iraq and 9/11 for Israel: The Illusion of Two States

Pressure on Israel as well as on the Palestinians is widely expected as a result of the



Anglo-American victory in Iraq. If only to ease Arab anti-Americanism, the Bush administration, under British prodding, is finally to solve the unsolvable: A “road map” is pushed, containing three phases of reciprocal commitments, culminating in a Palestinian state by 2005. The influential *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman has argued that the U.S. strategic interest in establishing a cooperative democratic Iraqi political center will be compromised if the United States leaves the Palestinian issue unaddressed: “The ability of any Iraqi politician to be openly pro-U.S. will be restricted if the Palestinian conflict burns on and the Bush team is seen as siding only with Ariel Sharon and doing nothing to defuse the situation.”²

The two-state solution is widely hailed by moderate insiders and impatient outsiders as the fairest compromise and the only realistic way out of the long-standing dilemma. This alleged “consensus” on the likelihood, desirability, and eventual stability after the establishment of two states also needs to be questioned. The counter-arguments and gloomy evidence seem much more persuasive, as can be summarized in eight propositions.

1. There will not be much U.S. pressure on Israel to make concessions on settler evacuation, return of refugees, and border restorations. Calculations about U.S. voters’ sentiments in the 2004 presidential elections are more important than Arab hostility. Despite the stalled “road map” and Bush’s temporary personal involvement with the Middle East conflict, the Republican leadership cannot afford to alienate influential sections of the American electorate. With the Iraqi quagmire dominating the Washington agenda, disengagement from another intractable situation prevails.

While the Bush administration was initially split on how much Israel should be pressured on negotiations, 9/11 and the Iraq war cemented the alliance between the United States and Israel. Bush’s anti-terrorist mobilization encountered the strongest support among evangelical Republicans. The underestimated Christian Right in the United States, numbering forty million in one of the most avowedly religious countries, resembles Islamic fundamentalists in its dogmatism and fervor. As the late Edward Said has written: “A peculiar alliance between Israel’s influential neo-conservative American supporters and the Christian extremists is that the latter support Zionism as a way of bringing all the Jews to the Holy Land to prepare the way for the Messiah’s Second Coming; at which point Jews will either have to convert to Christianity or be annihilated. The bloody and rabidly anti-Semitic teleologies are rarely referred to, certainly not by the pro-Israeli Jewish phalanx.”³

The Bush administration has clearly subcontracted its policy on the crucial issue to a hardline Israeli government. “Unconditional Support for Sharon,” writes *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, “has squandered post-9/11 sympathy and brought relations with the Muslim world to a new low.”⁴ The convergence of Bush and Sharon, first manifested in their joint rejection of a fumbling Arafat, of course, does not signal a genuine break with previous American policy. Washington always gave Israel significant latitude and funded its expansionism, regardless of the government in power. But, the open abandonment of the pretence of the United States acting as an “honest broker” and the defiance of international obligations in regard to the Palestinians, represents a departure from all previous U.S. policies since the foundation of Israel.

This shift is often falsely attributed to an influential “Jewish lobby” in Washington, resembling anti-Semitic conspiracy theories of Jewish world domination, but the American turn results from many more opportunistic strategic considerations. Both competing American and (anti-war) European corporate power blocs are

supportive of the Jewish state. In any case, the term “Jewish lobby” is misleading, as evangelical U.S. Christians comprise the bulk of what should accurately be called a “pro-Israeli, or pro-Zionist government lobby.” Unlike Israelis, the Jewish intellectuals and opinion-leaders in the United States are as split on the morality and legality of the recent Iraq war as other groups. In short, the pro-Israeli lobby cannot be said to primarily represent Jews.

2. Even if there were a serious American push to impose a settlement hostile to Israel, Israel would and could successfully resist. Even though Israel depends heavily on the United States, it is incorrect to assume that the United States can dictate its solution to its client. One has to take seriously Sharon’s proclamation of a right to veto. In a *Ha’aretz* interview Sharon insisted that, “I will not make concessions in the future on anything that is related to the security of Israel.” He portrayed himself as the protector of “the fate of the Jewish people” by explaining to President Bush “that this is the historic responsibility that I bear for the future. . . . We will be the ones who in the end decide what is dangerous for Israelis.”⁵ In reluctantly supporting the road map (which already had been accepted unconditionally by the Palestinians), Sharon preserves his amiable relationship with the Americans, whose veto is needed when the real bargaining over borders and settlers starts.

3. At best, an independent Palestinian state constitutes a strategically necessary interim arrangement. The idea of separation from a security threat may be useful to defeat the sizeable Israeli faction that wants to annex the “promised land” or expel the Palestinians. The “security wall” that gobbles up more Palestinian land at least signifies to the Israeli right that there will be a Palestinian state behind the wall. Even a truncated mini-state preserves Palestinian identity of a people exhausted, demoralized, and utterly at the mercy of their adversary.

But the limited sovereignty and fragmentation of the ghettoized Palestinian entity will be a constant source of friction and radicalization. A nominal Palestinian pseudo-state without an economy, except the export of labor, amounts to what could be called the “Lesotho option.” Sovereign in name only, the Palestinian entity would lack even the territorial contiguity of Lesotho. Another analogy, from North America, may also fit. Ian Gilmour has labeled Palestinians “the Native Americans of the contemporary world.” Huddled into self-governing enclaves, like America’s pacified indigenous inhabitants, Gilmour predicts, “The Palestinians may eventually get something that is called ‘a state.’ Very possibly, however, it will in reality be a Bantustan or a reservation.”⁶

In short, the main advantage of the two-state option lies in its potential appeal to an Israeli public that is inclined to back much harsher repression. For the Palestinians, a state of their own means survival of the Palestinian identity in the face of an overwhelming adversary.

Historically, dispossession of land and resources characterizes both Israel’s and South Africa’s domination. With settler expansionism, Israel continues a creeping annexation, but South Africans in apartheid wanted to shed territory. Grand apartheid amounted to a territorially defensive rather than expansionist strategy. In Bantustans or African homelands, blacks were supposed to administer their own poverty and police themselves in the name of self-determination. Since the Jewish state has been hijacked by settler designs and religious myths of a promised land, indirect rule has been replaced by increasingly blatant direct and permanent occupation. Palestine has developed into the modern laboratory of “ethnic policing,” as



James Ron argues in his intriguing comparison between state violence in Serbia and Israel. According to this analysis, harsher “ethnic cleansing” is adopted as the preferred option against ethnic adversaries outside defined borders, while less abusive “ethnic policing”⁷ is used against “others” inside state boundaries.

4. Apart from a few insignificant outposts, entrenched settlements together with new security walls are unlikely to be dismantled, short of an unlikely civil war in Israel. “Freezing” settlements or “halting settlement activity,” as the Americans demand and Likud opposes, is not the same as evacuating expanding colonies on Palestinian territory.

Apartheid designated different rights for blacks and whites. Israeli domination extends beyond rights to total physical domination in the name of security. Apartheid denationalized blacks in 87 percent of South Africa designed as a white area. Blacks were declared disenfranchised foreigners in the country in which they were born. Blacks were deprived of rights and white privileges but could never be totally segregated spatially and economically from their white fellow citizens.

Since Israel no longer employs Palestinians from the territories, it can go further and erect physical walls of separation. Israel’s so-called security barriers turn many Palestinians into prisoners in their own homeland. Inhabitants of fenced-in enclaves depend on their Israeli gatekeepers for mobility and on the international community for survival, which bears the costs of occupation. It is this burden of feeding and guarding a hostile population that the Israeli two-state advocates want to avoid. The apartheid rulers did not enjoy this option, since they were dependent on black labor.

5. The stalled road map of the Quartet (United States, UN, European Union, Russia), has to overcome seemingly insurmountable realities on the ground that counteract noble intentions. In their judicious and fair-minded history of the Palestinian people, Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal speak of “politicide,” which they define as “renewed attempts to wipe out (Palestinian) political autonomy.”⁸ In light of steadfast resistance, Israel may have to modify the strategy of “politicide.”

Compared with the Oslo accord, the road map is a progressive document in as far as it spells out a clear end of a three-phase process: an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. For the first time, an Israeli government has formally endorsed the creation of a Palestinian state. But the plan only mentions “provisional borders” of this state. It is silent on what to do with settlers who refuse to depart. The road map lacks enforcement mechanisms. It operates on the basis of violation of trust instead of binding international law. Since decisions of the Quartet are made by consensus, it gives the United States (and indirectly Sharon) veto power. Sharon himself has suggested that the road map ought not to be taken seriously, despite having demanded fourteen “corrections” to the plan. The United States has assured Israel that it will address Israeli concerns “fully and seriously” during the implementation of the road map.

Most left-leaning Israeli and Palestinian commentators quickly dismissed the road map as a ploy, comparable to the previous and inconsequential Mitchell and Tenet plans. Palestinians mock the paralyzed United States plan with: “They have the roads, we have the map.” Typical of the Israeli left is veteran peace activist Uri Avnery: “The truth is, in this whole document there is not one word that Sharon could not accept. After all, with the help of Bush he can torpedo any step at any time. To sum up: Much Ado about Nothing. As evidenced by the fact that neither Sharon nor the settlers are upset.”⁹ But the settler parties are strongly opposed to the

road map and have accused Sharon of treason. Many Likud politicians share this view and oppose even a Palestinian mini-state, which is reminiscent of the bitter South African debate between Afrikaner right-wingers and National Party supporters during 1980s. The “Geneva Accord,” negotiated by the discredited Oslo architect, Yossi Beilin and counterparts in the Palestinian authority (PA), would seem destined for a similar fate in the historical dustbin as long as the well-intentioned peace activists lack a sizeable constituency. The isolated Palestinian moderates will be confronted by far stronger radical factions with the question: who gave them the authority to negotiate away the right of refugee return?

6. Iraqi financing of Palestinian families who lost relatives in suicide missions is now cut, and Iran has emerged as a much more formidable supporter of Islamist extremists. But both Iran and Syria are under U.S. pressure to stop supporting Hezbollah and the Gaza-based Hamas, whose main financial backer in the past was, paradoxically, U.S.-allied Saudi Arabia. Initially, even Israel supported the Hamas fundamentalists as a counterforce against the secular and nationalist Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

Even if the reformed Palestinian Authority seriously intended to curb attacks on Israeli targets, it would not be able to do so without the willing cooperation of Hamas and the smaller militias and that would depend on reciprocal Israeli actions. In the past, declared ceasefires were scuttled by Hamas when Israelis assassinated leaders. Extremists on both sides goaded each other in the unending cycle of violence. Israel claimed in vain that its military could successfully deal with an enraged population. Even if roadblocks and curfews prevented more suicide bombings, the violence persists, as long as the occupation prevails and the state-sponsored settlers roam freely. Soldiers and settlers in the occupied territories were always considered legitimate military targets by the Palestinian resistance, in contrast to civilians in Israel proper whose killings amount to human rights violations under international law. Although it is not official policy to harm Palestinian civilians, Israel has also killed many more civilians than combatants by using disproportional force to liquidate activists.

One example may suffice: On October 20, 2003, a helicopter fired a rocket at a car in Gaza. A crowd gathered and a few minutes later a second rocket hit the scene, killing seven, including a doctor, and wounding dozens of bystanders. According to *New York Times* correspondent James Bennet, Alex Fishman, one of Israel’s foremost military journalists and no dove, wondered in the pages of the largest daily, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, if Israel still imposed any limits on itself. “How long can we hurt innocent civilians?” he asked. “Is it conceivable that somebody on our side has decided that all of Palestinian society is the target?” He also asked if the military method used recently “actually intensifies and broadens the circles of hatred for generations.”¹⁰

In short, the stepped-up assassinations of Hamas leaders provoke predictable retaliatory carnage. Taking out extremists may stop terror if the extremists are isolated individuals, but not when 30 percent of a frustrated population sympathizes with them. The dead are easily replaced, for the assassinations multiply the would-be bombers.

The author of a book on the IRA, Kevin Toolis, points out that the Provisional IRA twice tried to decapitate the British Cabinet. The British army could have easily assassinated the entire IRA leadership in Ulster. Since this action, according to Toolis “would not have destroyed violent Irish republicanism or weakened the



Provisional IRA,” it was instead decided to establish a relationship with the leader Martin McGuinness, which ultimately led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The author rightly advises: “If a peace process is serious, each side must accept the other as they find it rather than remould their enemies into a more compliant state by assassination and political diktat.”¹¹

The security agents of the apartheid regime also targeted African National Congress (ANC) supporters, particularly white intellectuals at home and abroad but acted with restraint toward the top ANC leadership, who responded likewise. Not one apartheid leader was assassinated and most prominent ANC leaders in exile survived the clandestine war against them. Even so-called leading collaborators, such as Buthelezi, were informally protected by the ANC in exile against local militants.

7. Just as South African homeland leaders were perceived as typical collaborators in the service of anti-liberation forces, so the attempts by Palestinian Authority (PA) reformists to pacify a radicalized street are likely to fail, because the PA lacks domestic legitimacy, despite the integrity or noble intentions of individuals involved. The more the U.S., EU, or Egypt support and welcome such forces, the more they are weakened as perceived stooges of outside powers. Only if the reformed PA were able to reduce the 50 percent unemployment, ease travel restrictions, curb settler expansionism, and improve general living conditions, could the moderate Palestinian leadership prevail. Neither Israel nor the United States did strengthen the domestic legitimacy of Palestinian pragmatists by making minimal concessions. No Palestinian leader can heed the United States/Israeli demand “to destroy the terrorist infrastructure” without provoking a civil war.

8. After further polarization and more failed attempts to reach a final status agreement, a “Mandela solution” may emerge. Only an untainted individual with the moral authority to negotiate a controversial compromise on behalf of a fragmented constituency may be able to turn things around. Marwan Barghouti, still in prison, may be one such person. If Israel were wise, it would groom its Palestinian Mandela rather than insist on anointing its own negotiating partners. James Ron quotes a senior official that “Israel’s greatest nightmare is that one day there will appear a Palestinian Nelson Mandela in the West Bank who will demand one man, one vote.”¹²

A Single, Bi-National Israel/Palestine as a Utopian Alternative?

Currently, the possibility of a physical Palestinian state is being destroyed. Few Palestinians would object to the building of a high-security barrier exactly on the 1967 border. Just as Americans try to protect themselves in vain with a fence on their own territory against illegal Mexican immigrants, so the great majority of Israelis support the illusion of an impenetrable protective barrier. Equitable land swaps for Jewish settlements around Jerusalem would also find Palestinian support. But the colonization continues in the very heart of the potential new state. Tony Judt comments harshly that the electronic fence supporters have “missed the last fifty years of history. Like the Berlin Wall, it confirms the moral and institutional bankruptcy of the regime it is intended to protect.”¹³

Since more Palestinian land is confiscated weekly for new barriers around ethnic

enclaves deep in Palestinian territory, and since the major fortified Jewish settlements, accessible on separate roads, are unlikely ever to be evacuated, a common state may ultimately be envisaged. In any case, permanent occupation by settler militias and the Israeli regular army already creates a de facto common entity. In a single Israeli control system, Palestinian resistance, is likely to change from a national liberation effort to a civil rights struggle. A common state (what Israelis usually refer to as a 'bi-national state') amounts to the economically most feasible and politically most democratic solution, since there are no second-class citizens in an official ethnic state or "ethnocracy." It would also solve the refugee problem, when the law of return applies to both Jews and Palestinians equally. Furthermore, settler evacuation would cease to be an issue; they could stay where they are and a court would settle claims for compensation, as happened in South Africa for land confiscations under the Group Areas Act.

But there is little chance of that even if the Israeli left would support such a South African solution, as long as Palestinians are perceived as a threat to Jewish survival. Even a Uri Avnery argues for a two-state solution for a variety of strategic reasons. On the right, on the other hand, many fear that a Palestinian state amounts to a *two-stage* solution. Soon Arabs would be a demographic majority in the former Jewish state. The former Labor Party Speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, has put the dilemma of his idealized "last Zionist generation" into the stark alternative: "Do you want democracy? No problem. Either abandon the greater land of Israel, to the last settlement and outpost, or give full citizenship and voting rights to everyone, including Arabs. The result, of course, will be that those who did not want a Palestinian state alongside us will have one in our midst, via the ballot box."¹⁴ However, a return to the original caring and humane Zionism does not solve the inherent contradiction of exclusion of non-Jews from the ethnic state. In the European and North American reality of ethnically mixed, multicultural democracies, the very idea of an exclusive ethnic state is an anachronism. In the Middle Eastern reality of communal hostilities and national identities, the Zionist identity is deeply rooted and very difficult to dislodge. Can the Israeli public abandon its Zionist identity and embrace an inclusive civic nationalism of all its inhabitants?

The more an authentic two-state option is undermined by permanent settlements and security barriers, the more the single-state option may be embraced by Palestinians in the long run. In 2003, a bare majority (52 percent) of Palestinians prefer a two-state solution, while there is overwhelming support for "open borders between two states" (82 percent), "joint economic ventures" (65 percent) and "reconciliation of two peoples."¹⁵ Currently no Palestinian party and only a few intellectuals (such as Edward Said and Ahmad Samih Khalidi) as well as a few Jewish anti-Zionists, among them (Meron Benvenisti, Jeff Halper, Baruch Kimmerling, and Ephraim Nimni) advocate a common state. The logic of Zionist expansionism may ultimately destroy the very idea of an exclusive Jewish state. Even sophisticated friends of Israel, such as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman recognize that the two-state option is being totally discredited with people being caged into apartheid ghettos. "Rather than create the outlines of a two-state solution, this wall," warns Friedman, "will kill that idea for Palestinians, and drive them, over time, to demand instead a one-state solution – where they and the Jews would have equal rights in one state."¹⁶ Assassinating or deporting an elected Arafat could also be perceived as a symbolic death of an independent Palestinian Authority. The dialectic of uncompromising Zionist extremism would have produced its own destruction. Like the long



anti-apartheid struggle, this South African solution of equal citizenship would resonate abroad much more than creating another undemocratic, corrupt Arab state. Friedman senses this danger: "If American Jews think it's hard to defend Israel today on college campuses, imagine what it will be like when their kids have to argue against the principle of one man, one vote."

A redefinition of Israel from an ethnic state with a guaranteed Jewish majority to a pluralist, multicultural democracy requires a reciprocal Arab revision of an anti-Zionist identity that frequently flows into anti-Semitic stereotyping of the worst kind. Israel's moral legitimacy has yet to be accepted by its neighbors. As long as crude anti-Semitic stereotypes such as the Czarist forgeries of the "Protocol of the Elders of Zion" or even Holocaust denial is peddled among Islamists, the South African solution of an inclusive, tolerant common state remains a utopian vision. Yet why should the Shoa and historical suffering of the Jewish people not be part of the Palestinian curriculum? Why should the historical facts of the dispossession of the Palestinians since 1948 (what Palestinians call "nakba" or "catastrophe") not be part of Zionist identity? Why does nobody in Israel/Palestine, apart from a few marginalized post-Zionist historians and writers, demand a Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Can the contradictory historical narratives be reconciled?

Only when people come to grips with their past truthfully; when they no longer feel humiliated; when they can realistically envisage security, recognition, respect, and economic improvements, will they be ready to embrace radical alternatives. Overcoming intolerance depends on diminished threat perceptions and optimistic expectations on both sides in a win-win situation. That is the lesson from the remarkable South African compromise.

South African Lessons for Peace-Making

The South African (SA) settlement directly contradicts current Israeli policy in several respects. Four obvious lessons stand out:

1. It is still Israeli government doctrine that the enemy has to be subdued first, before the government will negotiate. The Army Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon says that the war aims at "burning the fact of being defeated into the Palestinian's consciousness." In the SA stalemate the negotiations took place between undefeated equals. In contrast, Likud's policy dictates terms of surrender. Such supremacist talk ensures rejection, because it does not allow the opponent even the face saving dignity of respect. The SA negotiations started in earnest when a mutual perception of stalemate prevailed, unlike the continuing power asymmetry in the Middle East. Here each side anticipates victory by wearing the other side down.

2. Israel insists that violence must stop before negotiations begin. This condition hands veto power to any individual with a gun or explosives. Nobody is able to enforce such demands. Trust is the outcome, not a precondition of negotiations. Enemies, not friends, need to negotiate. Negotiations do not depend on a ceasefire, but have to be unconditional. The ANC continued with the "armed struggle" long after negotiations had started and so did the white government's violence to enforce its laws.

3. Negotiators have to be freely chosen by each side. One side cannot dictate to the other who should be their leader. Had then President de Klerk insisted that he would only talk to the nationalist wing of the ANC and exclude Communists (as

some had advocated), negotiations would not have started.

4. If controversial compromises are to be accepted by an indoctrinated constituency on both sides, a prudent leadership must educate its following in political literacy. Yet, giving up dreams and master-narratives is painful for activists. The ANC had to shed the socialist dream of capturing the commanding heights of the economy, and whites had to give up state power in return for peace. Palestinians may have to compromise on the principal right of refugee return and Israelis on settlement maintenance and final borders. In such situations, the danger of populist outbidding looms for pragmatic leaders. This necessitates organization and strengthening of civil society institutions on both sides. The Canadian columnist Shira Herzog has rightly identified that for SA leaders “involving their own people was essential for negotiations to succeed.”¹⁷ This transparency of leadership-deal-making, complementing the top-down process with bottom-up information, is missing on both sides in the present conflict.

Although the various South African professional organizations and NGOs could have engaged more in the struggle against apartheid, the record of some has been far more distinguished than the silence of their Israeli counterparts. Gideon Levy has ironically pointed to the protest of Israeli ecologists against the destruction of rare iris flowers by the new separation walls. He laments the amnesia about the thousands of people whose livelihood was destroyed in contrast. “Those green groups join a long list of other bodies — doctors, working women, artists, journalists, and academics — who don’t want to see what is being done in the territories in fields they presumably care about and protect.”¹⁸

The liberal South African universities officially raised their voices when the apartheid regime interfered with their academic freedom, while the Israeli universities remain officially silent when the Palestinian institutions are closed by military decree. The Israeli Medical Association has never commented on the impossible working conditions of their Palestinian colleagues in the territories. When more than 100 000 Palestinian workers were dismissed almost overnight, the solidarity of Histadrut was as much exposed as a pipedream as the concern of the right-wing white mine-workers union for their black fellow miners in South Africa. The psychology of denial of unpleasant but obvious truths in both Israel and South Africa have been superbly probed by Stanley Cohen.¹⁹ It is debatable whether the myopia in Israel results from appalling ignorance, media manipulation in a climate of siege, or willful collusion.

Conclusions

The ongoing tragedy in Israel-Palestine has yet to be properly named. The antagonists don’t even agree whether the conflict is between two nationalisms, as Zionists assert, or amounts to liberation from settler colonialism, as Palestinians state. Modern apartheid as a mobilizing label does not fit. The differences outweigh the similarities. Palestinians who insist that “Israeli apartheid” must be fought with the same methods as the successful anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa are not realistic. They miss out on alternative strategies in a totally different context.

Apartheid was eased by paternalism in a racist feudal order. On the whole, blacks and whites did not long to kill each other. An outdated racial hierarchy eventually clashed with industrial imperatives when the costs exceeded the benefits of the minority in a global pariah state. In the far more legitimate Israel, outside support



and a supportive diaspora compensate for the bleeding. South African white beneficiaries could hardly cultivate this deep feeling of victimhood, which both peoples cherish in the Middle East. Without the power of industrial action (strikes, consumer boycotts) in an interdependent economy — which made the crucial difference in South Africa — Palestinians are at the mercy of a superior adversary in every respect. Palestinians have to recognize the asymmetry of power, unlike the mutual perception of stalemate in South Africa. A former Israeli cabinet minister (Benny Alon) advocates making Palestinian “life so bitter that they will transfer themselves willingly.” This piecemeal dispossession out of the limelight, the quiet, “soft transfer” of a Palestinian educated class through emigration, leaves behind a leaderless, dispirited people. The vanquished exacerbate their misery through immoral and counterproductive suicide attacks, romanticized as heroic martyrdom.

In this situation a breakthrough must come from the superior power. The Likud-led Israeli government has the capacity but not the willingness to compromise; the Palestinian mainstream has the willingness but lacks the capacity to reach a fair settlement. ❀

Notes

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